

SGR link: Ruto throws ball in Museveni's

Mr Museveni wants railway infrastructure bottlenecks addressed because they are making Uganda's goods more expensive in the region and on the international market.

BY ANDREW BAGALA

Kenya's President, Dr William Ruto, has thrown the ball in the court of his Ugandan counterpart, Yoweri Museveni, after breaking ground for construction of the Naivasha-Kisumu-Malaba Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) at the weekend in Kisumu City.

During the ceremony on Saturday, Mr Museveni said their key plan is to move all heavy cargo away from roads to railway to cut transport costs and time.

"The railway is part of the rationalisation of our transport system, especially on the Uganda side, which is irrational and wasteful. Why? Because the items being transported are concentrated on the road, i.e. passengers, light cargo, heavy cargo, and petroleum products, are all on the road," Mr Museveni said.

He added: "Our plan is to transfer all heavy cargo to the railway, then transfer all the petroleum products to the pipeline and water transport, since we now know that passengers and light cargo are for the roads. In transporting heavy cargo and petroleum to the pipeline, we are not aiming at convenience and overcrowding the road with all the items, but also looking at the competitiveness of our economies."

Such infrastructure limitations have been a common source of frustration for Mr Museveni, who maintains it denies Uganda's rights to access the sea, making their goods more expensive in the region and on the international market.

On November 11, 2025, during a talk show in Mbale City, Mr Museveni said it was madness for landlocked countries to be obstructed from accessing the sea to export their goods.

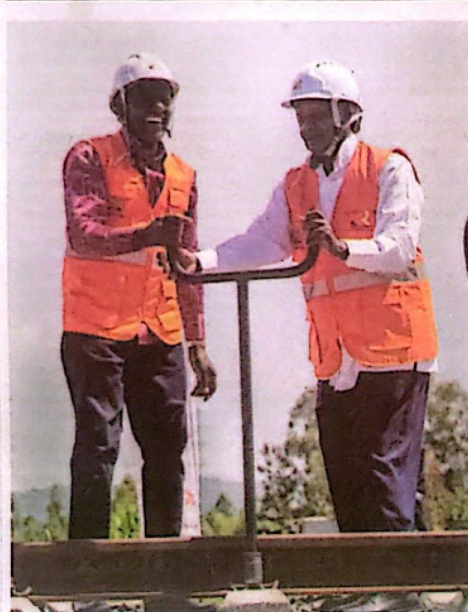
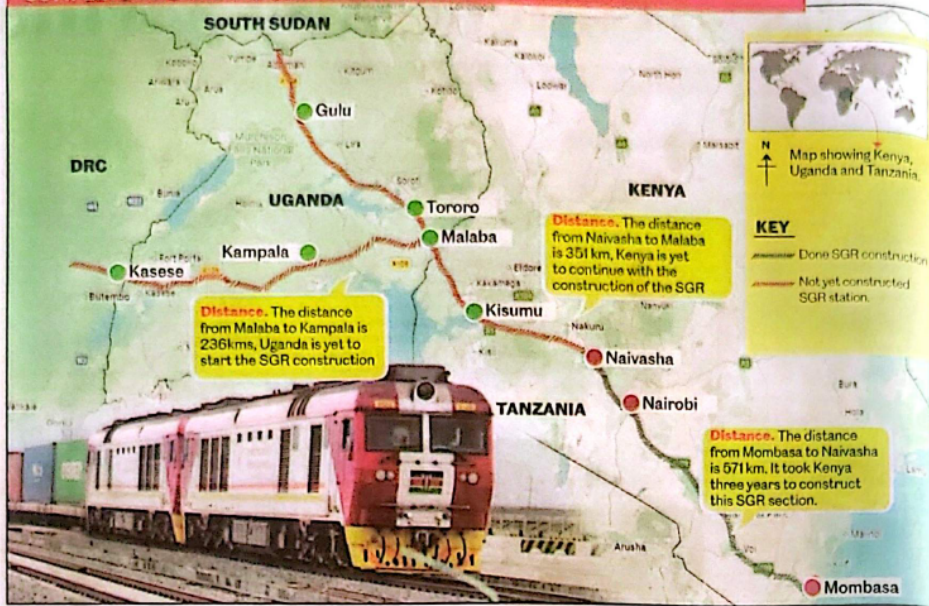
"That is why we have had endless discussions with Kenya. This one stops, another comes. The railway, the pipeline, the what, we discuss. But that ocean belongs to me. Because it is my ocean. I am entitled to that ocean. In the future, we are going to have wars. In the future, we are going to have wars," Mr Museveni said.

With the groundbreaking of the construction of the Naivasha-Kisumu-Malaba SGR line, Uganda has to fast-track the construction of its SGR line, and connect it to Kenya to have a seamless transfer of cargo.

Dr Ruto's government has given itself between two and three years to complete the construction of the 371km SGR from Naivasha to Malaba on the Kenya border, while Mr Museveni's leadership plans to complete their 272km SGR section from Malaba to Kampala, a year or two after the Kenyans have completed theirs.

On Saturday, Dr Ruto said they expect the SGR to be extended beyond Kampala City.

COMPLETE AND INCOMPLETE SGR WORKS



Kenyan President William Ruto and his Ugandan counterpart Museveni at the ground breaking ceremony for the construction of the Naivasha-Kisumu-Malaba Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) in Kisumu City at the weekend. PHOTO/COURTESY

"Above all, this railway will bring life to our long-held aspiration for true regional integration. It will enable the seamless movement of people and goods from the port of Mombasa through Nairobi, across Kenya's hinterland, and onward to Kampala and beyond, transforming journeys that once took days into trips measured in hours," Dr Ruto said.

Mr Museveni launched the construction of the SGR on the Ugandan side in November 2024.

Unfortunately, Uganda hasn't secured the Euro 2.7 million (\$hs11.72 trillion) in funding yet, despite Mr Museveni launching the project in 2024.

Uganda now has to look for funds to finance the Malaba-Kampala SGR line to connect to Kenya to avoid shifting cargo from the Kenyan trains at Malaba onto trucks, should Nairobi complete its first.

But Mr David Mugabe, the spokesperson of the SGR project in Uganda, said negotiations are ongoing to secure the funding.

"Negotiations for external funding with the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Islamic Development Bank are ongoing. The officials of the AfDB are to visit Uganda next week (this week)," Mr Mugabe said yesterday.

Uganda is expected to shoulder 15 percent of the total budget, while the development institutions will foot 65 percent. The rest of the 20 percent of the funding will be contributed by export credit agencies, namely the companies that would provide equipment and technology for the SGR.

So far, Uganda has contributed \$hs329b, which is being used by the contractor to set up factories for rail sleepers, a batching plant (concrete mixture plant), labour camps, and for the limited notice proceeds (geological technical studies).

Mr Mugabe said the geological studies have been completed and the labour camps are being set up, while the land acquisition is still ongoing.

He said they have acquired 80 percent of the land.

"We have started land acquisition in [the districts of Mukono and Wakiso, and Kampala City. We are waiting for funds to clear all the land owners]," Mr Mugabe said.

He said their wish is to complete the SGR line from Malaba to Kampala at the same time as Kenya is completing its line at the border to avoid shifting cargo from the train to trucks.

Kenya would use diesel-powered trains based on the Chinese model, while Uganda would use electric-powered Turkish models, which requires harmonisation for the smooth transfer of cargo.

Mr Mugabe said the technical experts constructing SGR from both countries have met to harmonise the technical part.

Mr Museveni said he planned to extend the SGR line from Malaba to Kampala, and to the borders of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan.

"For Africa to survive, we have to not only produce products of high quality, but also make them affordable. According to our experience, the high cost pushers for raw materials, manufactured goods, and agricultural products are transport, electricity, and the cost of money."

"If Africa does not address these, we shall be outpriced, and our goods will not be competitive even within Africa. This is now where railway transport, water transport, the pipeline of petroleum products, and government-owned

court

PRESIDENT MUSEVENI'S STATEMENT ABOUT THE SGR EXTENSION FROM NAIVASHA TO MALABA

I am glad to be here to *kutema ekitebide* because of the SGR from Naivasha to Kisumu to Malaba. (Naivasha - Kisumu - 264km, Kisumu - Malaba - 107km) The railway is part of the rationalisation of our transport system, especially on the Uganda side - which is irrational and wasteful. Why? Because the items being transported are concentrated on the road i.e. passengers, light cargo, heavy cargo, petroleum products, are all on the road.

Our plan is to transfer all heavy cargo to the railway, then transfer all the petroleum products to the pipeline and water transport, since we now know that passengers and light cargo are for the roads. In transporting heavy cargo and petroleum to the pipeline, we are not aiming at convenience and *omwijo* (crowding) the road by all the items; but we are also looking at the competitiveness of our economies. For Africa to survive, we have to not only produce products of high quality, but also affordable in terms of costs. According to our experience, the high cost pushers for raw materials, manufactured goods and agricultural products are: transport, energy/electricity and the cost of money.

If Africa does not address these, we shall be outpriced and our goods will not be competitive even within Africa. This is now where railway transport, water transport, the pipeline of petroleum products, and government-owned banks come in. These banks, if they are government-owned, will not be looking for high profits. They will be looking at costs and moderate profits. They will give us what we need: low cost of transport, low cost of money, and low cost of electricity. The private sector can come in, but the government needs to agree with them about the prices that they charge, which means that they need patient capital. Therefore, I am here to launch SGR with our Kenyan brothers. I salute everybody.

banks come in," he said. This means that Uganda has to find funds for the extension of the SGR line to the Rwanda, DRC, and South Sudan borders, like Kenya has done on the Naivasha-Malaba railway.